Cornell's Merlin Bird ID App Makes It Possible for

People Like Me to Identify Birds

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Alright, I've got a small confession to make. Despite having a graduate degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences, I know very little about birds. Although conspicuously flying and singing around me whenever I'm looking at trees, aquatic insects, turtles, or wetlands, I just haven't put in the effort or time needed to crack the bird code. My excuses, whatever they may be, are even feebler now that The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and its various partners have their free mobile Merlin Bird ID App for helping people to identify birds.

The nice looking logo for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

The Merlin Bird ID app takes the user so much further than the book-style identification keys of the past. The first questions the App asks when you fire it up is: 1) where is your location and 2) what is the date? Yes, the Merlin app takes into account that birds migrate according to the seasons, quickly narrowing down the number of species that you might be likely to see outside your door. After these questions, the user specifies the approximate size, color, and activity of the bird (such as roosting, flying, or swimming). Voila!, a set of photos of possible bird species are displayed on the screen. Even with this information, many of us still might struggle with making a definitive bird identification. As a last clue, Merlin gives us one more important clue, sounds. At the press of a button, you can hear a recording of the various calls of each species.

It is clear that I'm running out of excuses for my poor bird identification skills. Now, if I could only get out of this office and track down some birds.

Alright [Merlin Bird ID App](#), see if you can help the author identify this one!

Photo from [Iowa State University Extension and Outreach](#).